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ABSTRACT

A study determined classroom teachers' opinions of causal factors of reading failure and reported their attitudes on the major issues in reading instruction as suggested in current research. A representative sample of 100 elementary classroom teachers from School District #299 in the Chicago, Illinois area were sent the Ross Reading Survey. A total of 66 usable returns were received. Results indicated that teachers (1) felt they did not have the background necessary to remediate some of the reading problems pupils have; (2) felt there were too many levels in their reading classes, yet they still preferred heterogeneous grouping; (3) did not express the belief that school policy problems and lack of accountability were related to low reading achievement; (4) supported state-wide efforts currently being made to align assessment and instruction in Illinois; (5) supported early intervention programs and a reading curriculum which stresses training in phonics; and (6) believed poor reading achievement was caused by environmental problems in the home foremost, but also in the schools. Findings suggest that the importance of teacher inservice training cannot be overstated, and that elementary classroom teachers are informed on critical issues in reading instruction and are eager to learn more. (Contains 22 references and 1 table of data.) (RS)

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ED 396 248

READING FAILURE: VIEWS OF CHICAGO'S ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM TEACHERS

by Beverly Normand

Historically, reading disability has been attributed to many types of problems including: neurological, psycho-emotional, and environmental. Neurological explanations focus on visual difficulties, mild auditory deficits, and perceptual-motor deficits (Taylor, Harris, & Pearson, 1988; Walker, 1992; Rayner & Duffy, 1988). Psycho-emotional explanations of reading difficulty attribute performance to problems such as low motivation and interest and accompanying avoidance behavior. Environmental explanations focus on problems associated with the home environment such as language problems and conflicting values, as well as school environment problems like lack of time on task or inadequate teacher training (Bean and Hamilton, 1995; Taylor, Harris, & Pearson, 1988).

While it is difficult to isolate precise causes of low reading achievement, it is important that we examine educational, medical, and familial conditions which may be contributing to continued reading failure in urban settings, especially since national, state, and local efforts to increase literacy rates have been relatively ineffective over the past few decades (Bean & Hamilton, 1995; Jakubowski, 1993; Pikulski, 1994). Until recently, policy researchers rarely obtained views and suggestions from those most directly involved with the problem. We need to know teachers' opinions of the causes of reading failure and what they think about the major issues in reading instruction. Several such studies have been reported recently.

One of the studies that explored environmental manipulation aimed at increasing motivation was recently reported by Feitter and Hellekson. Children with poor reading skills often feel that they have little personal control over their own reading performance and lack motivation, according to some researchers. Feitter and Hellekson examined the effect of teaching at-risk first graders paraphrasing and self-verbalization techniques (Feitter, 1993). The intent of this instruction was to enhance students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. The study was designed to investigate the procedures that produced positive growth in reading achievement. Experimenters examined three groups of students. The treatment included an experimental group with an academic year of learning with paraphrasing techniques taught as an integral part of a holistic supplemental reading program. A second experimental group was instructed in the use of paraphrasing for only the latter half of the school year. The third group served as a control. The results revealed that the treatment groups performed at statistically (.05) higher levels than the control group.

A number of reading researchers have proposed that increased reading practice leads to improved reading skill. Shany and Biemiller (1995) hypothesized that reading practice

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would increase word recognition and comprehension. They designed a study where one experimental group received practice with teacher assistance, another received practice while listening to a tape, and a control group received no additional practice. The treatment groups read five to ten times the number of words that the control group read during a 16-week treatment period. As hypothesized, gains in the treatment group exceeded those in the control group in listening comprehension, reading speed for reading, and comprehension as measured by the Durrell test.

Research reviews indicate that early intervention programs will play a major role in eliminating reading failure. Pikulski (1994) reviewed five popular early intervention programs commonly being used in America: Success for All; the Winston-Salem Project; the Boulder Project; the Early Intervention in Reading (EIR) Project; and Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery, the most popular of the programs, involves tutors meeting with individual children outside the classroom for 30 minutes of daily instruction. The pupils read familiar stories orally, work with letters, dictate stories as the teacher writes, reconstruct materials/phrases/words to study at home, and read new books.

Success for All, a program used primarily in Maryland and Pennsylvania, serves Kindergarten through grade three pupils and groups pupils homogeneously for 90-minutes of daily reading in groups of 15-20 pupils. Individual tutoring sessions of 20 minutes supplement group instruction for students falling behind.

The Winston-Salem Project operates in some first grade classes in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The focus is on working with word patterns (e.g., in, pin, tin), based on the work of Cunningham. Extensive writing experience and writing portfolios are provided for the children.

The Boulder Project involves reorganizing and modifying the Chapter 1 instruction that is federally funded for children at risk who come from disadvantaged homes. Chapter 1 teachers work with three children for 30 minutes daily while a teacher's aide instructs another group of three at the same time. After a half year, the teacher and the aide exchange groups. The program includes repeated reading of predictable tradebooks, teaching word identification skills through analogy or word pattern, writing words, and writing about favorite topics in notebooks.

Early Intervention in Reading (EIR) is used in some first grade classes in Minnesota. Regular classroom teachers work with the five to seven lowest achieving students for an extra 20 minutes of reading instruction daily. Repeated reading of picture books, phonics, and blending is emphasized. Five minutes of work with aides and parent volunteers is provided to pairs of children.

In all five programs, texts that students can easily read are used, isolated skill practice materials are not used, extra reading and writing time is scheduled, deliberate phonemic awareness is provided, regular ongoing assessment is used, parents are involved, and teachers are experienced and certified.

Some researchers felt that it is not the type of reading programs that districts follow that determines high literacy rates, but the actual daily tasks that teachers provide in their classrooms (Paris and Turner, 1995). In their study, Paris and Turner observed 84 children in 12 classrooms during literacy instruction, interviewed students, compiled daily field notes, made verbatim transcripts of literacy lessons, and wrote descriptions of all the tasks that children completed. This study of motivation for literacy classified tasks as *open* or *closed*. Open tasks were defined as having no one correct answer; students were in control of both products they created and processes they employed, and there was no specified procedure to use. In closed tasks, the product, process, or both were specified.

The major finding of the study was that open tasks had powerful effects and were most successful in motivating pupils. These tasks provided opportunities for students to use reading and writing for authentic purposes (i.e., reading trade books and composing), conveyed the value of literacy for communication and enjoyment, and allowed pupils to be actively involved in constructing meanings and metacognitions.

Researchers have suggested that there are problems associated with Chapter 1 and reading pull-out programs and that these programs are only marginally effective (Spiegel, 1995). Classroom, Remedial, and Resource teachers' views of pull-out programs were assessed by Gallagher, Gelzheiser, Meyers and Yelich and reported in 1990. 40 classroom, 9 remedial reading, and 8 resource room teachers were interviewed individually. Teachers reported that the advantage of pull-out programs is intense structure and individualized instruction that is adapted to students' individual needs. Teachers reported as problems scheduling difficulties, missed academic instruction and inadequate communication and coordination among classroom teachers and pull-out teachers. Teachers made the following suggestions for improvement: 1) provide remedial and special instruction in regular classroom; 2) increase collaboration between classroom and pull-out teachers; and 3) improve scheduling.

Jakubowski (1993) also reported on the effectiveness of Chapter 1 Pull-Out Programs and reading achievement. In his review of literature, he reported on several studies which attempted to analyze the effects of Chapter 1 programs: The Sustaining Effects Study; TIERS; & IDS. The Industrial Dimensions Study confirmed the view that the majority of researchers hold, which is that compensatory programs have a small but positive effect on achievement. Jakubowski's study included 60 fifth and sixth grad students from a Chicago public school in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. Two groups were compared, one having been exposed to Chapter 1 programming, and the other group having regular class reading instruction. School records of performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were used and a pre-posttest control group design was employed. The results showed no statistically significant change in reading

achievement after a year of pull-out instruction, leading to the acceptance of Jakubowski's null hypothesis: no difference in reading achievement will be observed between pull-out and non-pull-out classes after a year of instruction.

A discussion of reading and literacy education would be incomplete without some mention of the Whole Language movement. Spiegel (1992), in a recent commentary, discussed the positive aspects of this movement including: 1)flexibility in materials and activities; 2) student and teacher choice and freedom; 3) exposure to writing and literature; and 4) use of authentic forms of assessment. Spiegel suggested that bridges must be built between whole language and traditional approaches to reading instruction and that systematic direct instruction is still necessary.

Hall (1994) recently studied teachers' opinions of Whole Language. Classroom teachers across the entire state of Mississippi were included. The teachers favored Whole Language reading instruction over traditional methods.

Poor reading ability among high school students adds to a growing plethora of problems among adolescents, including high rates of failure, absenteeism, and school drop-out (Deno and Espin, 1993). At the secondary level very little time is left and teachers must decide on the most effective and efficient use of time. In a recent study, Deno and Espin explored the feasibility of using a measure of generalized reading proficiency, or, reading aloud from content-area texts, as a diagnostic tool to help teachers determine the basis for student learning difficulties. The specific hypothesis tested was that text-based reading measures could be used to identify, among students having difficulty, two *subtypes* of reading disability: 1) general disabilities, reading-related learning difficulties that appear to be the result of widespread reading difficulties across content areas, and 2) content-specific reading disabilities, reading-related learning difficulties that are restricted to a specific content area. The former group were described as chronically poor readers. Members of the latter group were situationally poor readers (i.e., those with insufficient background knowledge or those having problems in the particular content area). Participants were 121 students in the tenth grade. Students first completed a background-knowledge vocabulary test. Then they read aloud from English and science texts, studied and answered questions based on the text, and read aloud from the texts again. Results of a discrepancy analysis yielded a group of 33 students with general deficits and 6 students with content-specific deficits. Poststudy reading scores for the content-specific group were significantly higher than for the general-deficit group, suggesting that students in the content-specific group benefitted more from study of the text than did students in the general-deficit group. Additional analysis supported the hypothesis that the content-specific deficits were due to a lack of background knowledge.

In an effort to increase the educational achievements of disadvantaged minority pupils, policy makers are approving teacher-directed basic skills programs for very young children (Daniels, Feiler, Milburn, and Stipek, 1995). These instructional approaches, referred to as didactic, inhibit risk-taking and problem-solving and foster dependency, nervousness, and low self-esteem, according to many experts (Daniels, Feiler, Milburn, and Stipek, 1995). Child-centered instructional programs on the other hand, are thought to increase effort persistence, understanding, self-concept, and intrinsic interest in learning (Stipek, 1995).

Children in child-centered preschools and kindergartens were compared to children in didactic programs in achievement and motivation variables in Stipek's study. 227 poor, minority, and middle-class children participated. Didactic programs children had higher scores on a letters/reading achievement test but not on a numbers test. Children in didactic programs scored negatively on most motivation measures. The program effects were the same for middle-class and disadvantaged children.

In 1992, 312 reading teachers responded to a survey questionnaire designed to determine consensus on content and curricular validity of the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading (Bruce and Osborn, 1994). The results of this survey indicated that: 1) most teachers prefer exclusive use of authentic passages as opposed to those who want passages written to test specific skills; 2) assessing reading to perform a task or gain information was seen as more important than assessing reading for literary experience; 3) there was strong support for the four cognitive aspects of reading used to develop questions that assess constructing, extending, and examining meaning; 4) there was unanimity for including open-ended test items; 5) there was more enthusiasm for investigating portfolio assessment and metacognition than for assessing fourth graders' reading fluency; and 6) there are more teachers who prefer state-by-state reporting of sources than oppose it.

Teachers' beliefs about reading and their instructional practices were not always consistent, according to the research reports. In a recent study done to examine the relationship between two Chapter 1 teachers' reader-based beliefs about reading and their instructional decision-making that took place daily, it was revealed that environmental factors influenced their decisions (Davis, Konopak, Readence, 1993). For each participant in the study, the researchers selected a pull-out class (six to ten students) to observe during ten separate Chapter 1 instructional sessions. The researcher wrote field notes, audiotaped the lessons, collected learning materials, and interviewed the teachers. Data were qualitatively analyzed and results indicated that school climate, personnel, and students influence instructional practices.

According to current research findings, traditional remedial reading programs have had a marginal impact upon literacy failure (Spiegel, 1995). In a recent publication, Spiegel reviewed traditional remedial programs and Reading Recovery programs in order to determine which principles and practices are necessary for the success of any reading program. The following successful practices were gleaned from her work: 1) intervention must take place early; 2) instruction should focus on comprehension of connected text, not fragmented study of isolated skills; 3) pupils must spend time reading; 4) children and teachers should be aware of the goals of instruction; 5) pupils must have more time on tasks; 6) children should be taught at their instructional level; 7) pupils must be taught strategies and the transferal of strategies to new situations; 8) writing should be part of a beginning reading program; 9) phonics awareness should be taught; and 10) intervention programs should be congruent with the classroom reading program.

Olson and Singer (1994) recently conducted a study with the purpose of exploring teacher beliefs, reflective change, and the teaching of reading. The subjects completed self report inventories about their theoretical orientation, conceptual framework, belief system and the teaching of reading. Classrooms were observed at least three times during a two month period to obtain records of instruction. Students completed an inventory of their perceptions of classroom instruction. Teachers in the study completed the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile by DeFord, which indicates a teacher's orientation to the teaching of reading. Teachers also responded to the Conceptual Framework of Reading Interview by Gove, and the Artley-Hardin Inventory of Teacher Knowledge of Reading. Teacher profiles served as a means of nonjudgemental self-evaluations. The research suggests that clarifying beliefs may force teachers to examine what they do and why they do it.

Opinions on reading instruction of the entire population of state-level textbook adoption committee members in 13 states were recently surveyed to determine: 1) perceptions of current issues in elementary reading instruction, and 2) their information sources. Participants reported four unresolved reading issues: a) assessment of progress, b) whole language vs. basal approaches, c) grouping for instruction, and d) tradebooks vs. basals. The most frequently consulted reading information sources used by committee members within the past twelve months were: magazines, newspapers, newsletter articles, media, and personal contacts with reading experts.

Jacobson, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth (1992) surveyed principals to determine their views of current issues in elementary reading instruction. The principals reported four major unresolved issues: 1) whole language versus basal approaches; 2) assessment of students' reading progress; 3) the use of tradebooks in place of basals; and 4) ability grouping for instruction. Principals listed the issue of phonics instruction as a prerequisite to formal reading as a major unresolved issue, too.

In another study (Wilken, 1992), the views of Chapter 1 teachers were solicited via a questionnaire, telephone interviews, and on-site visits. Wilken reported that the teachers were positive about their programs, but raised concerns about the large number of boys in Chapter 1 programs, nonexistent or partial program coordination and professional collaboration, lack of parent involvement, and the view that Chapter 1 students did not demonstrate the ability to compete in regular classrooms after the program.

Bean and Hamilton (1995) used focus group interview to assess views of teachers, reading specialists, and principals on reading programs. All groups expressed the need for staff development to help professionals work together more effectively. Other problems identified included difficulties establishing good working relationships between specialists and

classroom teachers, structure and scheduling problems, and developing programs congruent with the classroom program.

Research on classroom teachers' opinions of reading issues and causes of literacy failure is limited. Most of the reported investigations have focused upon opinions of specialists or administrators. However, the available literature indicates that the major unresolved issues include: ability grouping; whole language versus basal approaches; use of tradebooks versus basal; assessment structures; and readiness programming. Other difficulties reported include: staff development needs; parent lack of involvement; scheduling problems; and use of didactic versus child centered approaches.

A growing body of research suggests that reading failure is preventable for all but a very small percentage of children (Pikulski, 1994; Taylor, Starit, & Medo, 1994). Yet each year children enter school at risk for literacy failure and for whatever reasons, many children fail to obtain minimum skill proficiency. What's more, it is evident that schools are not meeting the needs of many children, in spite of remedial programs such as Chapter 1 and special education programs. Research indicates that federal Chapter 1 and other reading programs are only marginally successful (Bean and Hamilton, 1995; Pikulski, 1994; Jakubowski, 1993).

Currently there is a great deal of research on various types of reading disabilities and reading programs. Some studies indicate that it is not the type of reading program that a district follows, but the actual daily tasks that teachers provide to students in their classrooms which determines motivation for literacy (Turner and Paris, 1995; Spiegel, 1995; Spiegel, 1992). Classroom teachers are in the best position to support and to test research findings. Therefore it is of utmost importance to know what their opinions are and to represent their opinions in the research. Obtaining a consensus of their opinions on the causes of reading failure and on alternative programming should result in greater success in improving reading instruction. There is a glaring lack of research on classroom teachers' opinions, and there is even less, or perhaps none representing this population.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine classroom teachers' opinions of causal factors of reading failure and to report their attitudes on the major issues in reading instruction as suggested in current research.

Procedures

Population:

The total population includes all of the elementary classroom teachers in School District #299 in the Chicago area. The district consists of 342 regular elementary schools with a population of 310,000 students. There are approximately 9,918 teachers in the district

at the elementary level. 79.8% of the students come from low-income families (Chicago Public Schools, 1996).

Sample:

This study includes the available sample of one hundred classroom teachers. Sixty-six usable returns were received from the teachers. Efforts were made to obtain representation from a cross section of the district. Teachers from 46 different schools were included. Fifty-four percent of the teachers had 11 or more years of teaching experience, nineteen percent had 6-10 years, and twenty-seven percent had 1-5 years of experience.

In March of 1996, one hundred questionnaires were distributed to the teachers within the district. They were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements relating to issues in reading by circling the corresponding response. Additionally, they were asked to write comments about their opinions of the causes of reading failure among Chicago public school pupils. Many (76%) of the respondents wrote comments. The completed questionnaires were placed in collection envelopes in the offices of participating schools.

We chose to survey elementary classroom teachers because we felt that they represent important members of the reading community. We realized this approach excluded many others who teach reading but we wanted to solicit the reactions of regular teachers servicing young children as opposed to high school teachers and specialists.

Survey Instrument:

A survey questionnaire entitled *Ross Reading Survey* was constructed by the author to survey several issues derived from a review of current issues in reading research and practice. Articles, research journals, editorials, texts and commentaries were consulted to arrive at the issues probed. These probes related to: 1) whole language vs. basal reader approaches, 2) grouping by ability, 3) phonetic vs. other approaches, 4) use of tradebooks vs. basal readers, and 5) grading systems. There were a total of twenty-eight questions. The final statement was an open statement asking respondents to give their opinion of what they observed to be the major causes of reading failure among pupils in Chicago. The second set of probes included questions on: 1) school structure and policies, 2) teacher training, 3) fiscal issues, 4) parental involvement and 5) behavior of students.

The Ross Reading Survey was piloted with ten classroom teachers to check for clarity and acceptability.

The results of the questionnaire were tabulated and the percentages of each category were analyzed to determine the attitudes of the teachers toward current issues in reading and their opinions of the causes of reading failure. The Chi Square was used to determine the statistical significance (.05) of the responses.

Responses from the open statements were tabulated to determine what respondents said about specific issues, although the data was then analyzed qualitatively. Every issue discussed in the findings was raised by all respondents. In this study, it was not feasible to determine systematically the frequency of occurrence of various comments or views.

Findings

The data in Table 1 show that the majority of the teachers agree with the current trends and ideas found in the research concerning the need for additional staff development. In the section of the questionnaire that dealt with this issue, there was one question that received 80% agreement, another which received 72% agreement, and a third question which received 71% agreement. Respondents reported that more inservice training is needed for Chicago public schools, more specialists are needed to help pupils with specific reading disorders, and most teachers do not have the background to remediate the specific reading problems pupils are experiencing. Research also indicates the need for more staff development for classroom teachers.

Teachers felt that pupils experiencing difficulties should be placed in pull-out programs. 67% of the respondents agreed with the one question that dealt with this issue. Research indicates that there is a lack of consensus of this issue, depending on the severity of the problems the pupils are experiencing. The research reports that teachers feel that the advantages of pull-out programs is the provision of intensely structured and individualized instruction which can be adapted to the students' individual needs. Disadvantages reported in current research are related to scheduling problems, lack of congruency between the regular and special programs, and inadequate communication between specialists and regular classroom teachers.

There was a consensus of agreement on the issue of early intervention programming. 72% of the teachers agreed that readiness programming must be improved in order to solve the problem of declining reading scores. Current research indicates that early intervention and readiness programs are critical and must be increased. The current research, however, suggests a lack of consensus with respect to how very young children should be taught. Research suggests that didactic (teacher directed in contrast to child centered) methods for reading inhibits intellectual development related to creativity, self-esteem, and risk-taking behavior. Teachers in this study, however, were undecided. 49% of the teachers stated that they were not sure how they felt.

A significant number of teachers were of the opinion that the Whole Language approach should be used in teaching pupils. 54% of the teachers were in agreement with the

Table I N = 66

RESPONSES TO READING QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Agree B. Disagree C. Uncertain

		A	B	C
1.	I strongly believe in the use of trade books as opposed to basal readers as a way of increasing reading performance.	20 31%	18 28%	28 43%
2.	Pupils should be grouped homogeneously for reading	27 42%	26 40%	13 20
3.	I believe that reading achievement has not increased in Chicago despite School Reform.	33 50%*	15 23	18 28
4.	Isolated skill practice is one of the primary reasons our pupils perform poorly on reading tests.	29 44	19 29	18 28
5.	Chicago pupils are failing reading because they are not taught phonemic analysis.	34 52%*	16 25	16 25
6.	There is not enough instructional time scheduled for reading and scores are declining as a result.	30 46%*	22 34%	14 22%
7.	Too much disruptive behavior interferes with instructional time and pupils perform poorly as a result.	58 89%*	5 8%	3 5%
8.	More specialists are needed to help pupils with dyslexia and other reading disorders.	52 80%*	6 10%	8 13%
9.	I strongly believe that if more preventive programming were done for reading failure in first grade, scores would increase sooner.	51 78%*	3 5%	10 16%
10.	I strongly believe that too much time is spent on testing and that this reduces instructional time.	22 34%	31 47%*	13 20%
11.	Declining reading scores are mainly the result of school policy problems and lack of accountability.	23 35%	28 43%	15 23%
12.	The whole language approach should be used to increase reading performance.	35 54%*	12 19%	19 29%
13.	Universities and colleges are not preparing teachers to meet the needs of young readers.	22 34%	15 23%	29 44%
14.	More inservice training is needed in Chicago public schools.	47 72%	12 19%	7 11%
15.	Reading assessment and reading instruction are not congruent.	38 58%*	10 16%	18 28%
16.	Pupils seem uninterested and bored with current curriculum.	30 46%	26 40%	9 14%
17.	Lack of parent involvement seems to be the major problem.	49 75%*	9 14%	8 13%
18.	Pupils who are failing reading should be placed in special pullout reading programs.	44 67%*	18 28%	8 13%
19.	Teachers are expected to teach too many levels and as a result no group learns very much.	42 65%*	18 28%	6 15%
20.	Portfolio assessment ought to replace the traditional grading system.	25 38%	18 28%	23 35%
21.	Curriculum is mandated by the state but the appropriation of money to implement the curriculum is inadequate.	50 77%*	8 13%	8 13%
22.	Reading comprehension skills are not taught adequately. There is too much emphasis on oral reading.	21 33%	26 40%	19 29%
23.	Most teachers do not have the background to remediate the specific reading problems pupils are experiencing.	46 71%*	7 11%	13 20%
24.	The current didactic methodology for reading instruction inhibits intellectual development and needs improvement.	28 43%	6 10%	32 49%*
25.	Pupils should be grouped heterogeneously so that cooperative learning can take place in reading classes.	34 52%*	18 28%	14 22%
26.	I strongly believe that most teachers do not understand the critical issues in reading education.	19 29%	29 44%	18 28%
27.	Readiness programming must be improved in order to solve the problem of declining reading scores.	48 72%*	2 4%	16 25%
28.	Merit pay might make a difference in the poor performance of public school pupils.	13 20%	27 42%	26 40%

* Significance at the .05 level

question for this probe. While there is not consensus of opinion on this in current literature, there is growing support for the movement.

There was a lack of consensus on the issue of the use of tradebooks by the teachers in this study. 43% of the respondents were uncertain and the others were divided on this issue. The current research also reflects a lack of consensus among educators on this major issue.

Respondents showed a lack of consensus with respect to homogenous grouping, as shown in Table 1. 42% agreed, 40% disagreed, and 20% of the teachers were uncertain. However, the other question which probed this issues has received significant agreement. 52% of the responding teachers agreed that pupils should be grouped heterogeneously so that cooperative learning can take place. There is also a lack of consensus on this issue in current research reporting.

Chicago teachers lacked consensus of opinions with respect to the issue of portfolio assessment. 38% of the teachers agreed that Portfolio assessment ought to replace the traditional grading system, 28% of the teachers disagreed and 13% were uncertain. There is also a lack of consensus with respect to Portfolio assessment reflected in current research.

Another issue related to assessment was the issue of whether assessments and instruction need more alignment and congruency. The majority (58%) of Chicago teachers agreed that there is a need for more alignment. This opinion is also reflected in the current research.

Teachers agree with the research reporting with respect to the need for instruction in phonetic analysis. 52% of the teachers stated that pupils are failing because they are not taught using this method. There is a consensus of agreement on this issue in current research, too.

On the second set of probes, which was designed to assess teachers' opinion of the causes of reading problems, there was overwhelming agreement that pupils' behavioral problems in the classroom is a major factor related to low reading achievement. 89% of the teachers stated that too much disruptive behavior interferes with instructional time and that pupils perform poorly as a result.

Environmental influences of the home setting was judged to be the second most significant cause of low reading achievement. 75% of the teachers were in agreement with the statement that lack of parent involvement seems to be a major problem. Trends in current research tend to support this concern.

Another lack of consensus was lack of monies. 77% of the teachers reported that curriculum is mandated by the state, but the appropriation of money to implement the curriculum is inadequate.

There was consensus of agreement relative to instructional designs containing too many levels. 65% of the teachers agreed that they are expected to teach too many levels, and related this to low reading scores.

Teachers felt that time constraints impact negatively upon reading performance. A statistically significant number of respondents (46%) agreed that there is not enough instructional time scheduled for reading and that scores are declining as a result.

On the final open question which asked teachers their opinion of the major causes of reading failure among Chicago pupils, the majority of the teachers who responded identified lack of parent involvement as a primary cause. Lack of teacher training was in the next highest position listed as causal, and lack of inservice training followed in the third position.

The purpose of this study was to assess classroom teachers' opinions on the major issues in reading instruction and to explore their opinions of causes of low reading achievement.

There was consensus of agreement with most of the critical issues identified in the research literature, such as the need for early intervention and readiness programming, staff development and training. alignment of assessment and instruction, use of tradebooks, whole language instruction, phonetic analysis instruction, and portfolio assessment.

Chicago teachers lacked consistency with respect to their opinions on ability grouping.

Disruptive behavior of pupils, lack of parent involvement, and lack of state funding were reported as the three factors contributing most to reading failure in Chicago schools.

Conclusions

The results of this study led to several conclusions discussed in this section. First, the results indicate a great need for staff development programs. Teachers feel that they do not have the background necessary to remediate some of the reading problems pupils have. It can be inferred, too, that they do not have the time required to help pupils who may need one-to-one attention. Nonetheless, they express the desire to have more training in the area of reading instruction.

With respect to ability grouping, participants in this study responded inconsistently. For example, a significant majority of the teachers stated that there were too many levels in their reading classes. Yet they still prefer heterogeneous grouping, in contrast to

homogenous groupings, which, more often than not, result in fewer level. It might be inferred that teachers prefer a variety of ability levels for other reasons, including opprotunities for coopertive learning situations for the pupils.

Surprisingly, classroom teachers did not express the belief that school policy problems and lack of accountability were related to low reading achievement. This seems to indicate that classroom teachers have a fairly positive view of school policies and accountability of staff. On the otehr hand, teachers reported a lack of reading progress, despite School Reform, a new initiative established several years ago in Chicago.

The findings showed strong support for state-wide efforts currently being made to align assessment and instruction in Illinois. Teachers apparently support this effort, despite having to spend additional time testing and aligning curriculum.

Results demonstrate strong support for early intervention programs and a majority of the respondents supported reading curriculum which stresses training in phonics. Early intervention has traditionally been supported in the research literature and current research findings suggest that the early intervention programs such as Reading Recover and Success for All result in significant reading progress in comparison to some of the traditional reading intervention programs.

Finding of this study showed that classroom teachers believe poor reading achievement is caused by environmental problems in the home foremost, but also in the schools.

Implications

While there may be no single explanation for the cause of low reading achievement in urban settings, research findings suggest that lack of parent involvement is a growing concern and must be addressed, especially with respect to children at-risk. Early intervention programs must be supported and funding for these programs must be increased to meet the needs of children who do not have parental support. Programs which involve and support the parents of young children are especially needed now and there needs to be more alignment of readiness programs and parental support/monitoring/training.

The importance of teacher inservice training cannot be overstated, either. While classroom teachers cannot be expected to become reading specialists, they must be informed about the major issues in reading instruction and they must be given more assistance. This assistance might be offered within the school by scheduling more time for inservices and conferences or by increasing teacher assistants in the classrooms.

The issue of disruptive behavior in the classrooms must be addressed more and teachers must be given support so that disruptions are not unreasonable or threatening to classroom management and instructional time.

All reading programs should be evaluated on the basis of how well they follow exemplary teaching practices known to be successful. Also, it would be helpful to monitor progress of all first graders more carefully and provide first grade classes of low-achievers with additional support staff.

Finally, the findings of this study indicate that elementary classroom teachers are informed on critical issues in reading instruction and are eager to learn more. It would be helpful to duplicate this study using a larger sample/population.

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